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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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# RECRUITING -

## 1. PLANNING THE PROCESS

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Ontario Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs

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To the Municipal Clerk:

Please circulate this bulletin or make copies for distribution to councillors or staff of your municipality who may be interested in the subject. Additional copies are available at fifty cents each from the Publications Centre (see page 9).

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## Introduction

The hiring of staff for a municipality is one of the most important responsibilities that council and staff members have. It commits the municipality for a very long time to a large and continuing expense in the form of salary and, of course, the people hired will have an impact on the service the municipality provides and how effectively and efficiently that service is provided.

Most of the time, there is little reward for participating in the process or for finding the "right" person. The thought and effort that go into it are rarely recognized by the public and only when the "wrong" person is chosen does the quality of municipal staff get any attention.

In the small municipality, the need to hire staff will be infrequent enough to make even the senior staff member uncomfortable with the process. No doubt council will be involved and its members may be even less experienced in the hiring process. Even in the larger municipality, where the hiring decisions are more frequently left to supervisors, managers, department heads, and other senior staff, experience with recruiting may still not be sufficient to rely on. In fact, there are few people anywhere who, realizing the importance of hiring, feel sure of their abilities in this decision-making process.

This is one of a series of bulletins to be issued on the recruitment of municipal staff and is offered to councillors and staff to help with this important process. Each bulletin will examine one major part of the recruitment and selection process -- planning the process, determining what the job is and what kind of person should fill it, advertising, and interviewing. You may find advantages in adopting some of the suggestions in these bulletins the next time you have to hire a new employee.



## RECRUITING

### PLANNING THE PROCESS

#### What Are You Doing Now?

There are few rules to follow when you select staff -- each hiring situation demands unique treatment and each municipality might handle very similar situations differently. The level of the job to be filled, the importance of that job at the time, the quality of the person who held the job before, and innumerable other factors will dictate the way hiring is approached. So will the size of the municipality. Even the smallest municipalities, though, must go through basically the same steps when they are looking for a new employee, although they may not be experienced in the selection process.

Your municipality has been hiring people for a long time and will have established a way of going about it -- whether the procedure is formal and "official" or not, there will at least be some kind of history. You should find out how the process works now in your municipality, or has worked in the past, so that you can compare it against what is suggested in this series of bulletins. No doubt you will find differences. You may find that you like the way recruiting is handled now because it has worked for you. On the other hand, you may want to think about adopting some of the suggestions in these bulletins. In any case, looking at how you have done something in the past and considering ways of improving it is usually a beneficial exercise.

#### When and Where Should Recruiting Start?

Because we are all used to DOING things, it is natural to think that the first step in recruiting is writing the ad. But even before you think about the ad, you should firmly establish what it is you are looking for. Keeping sight of the job will help you zero in more quickly on the right person and will prevent you from being swayed by candidates who would be nice to have around but really do not have the qualifications needed to do the job. (Or may have too many qualifications for the job!)



Since the purpose of recruiting is to fill vacancies, it would help if you could predict vacancies as far in advance as possible. Of course a vacancy may occur unexpectedly with someone giving a two-week notice. But other situations give you more lead time -- someone may be getting married in a few months and moving away, someone may be due to retire in a year or so, and you may know of people on staff who will probably leave to pursue their careers or because they are simply dissatisfied. If you take a moment to consider each staff member of the municipality or in your department and their personal lives and attitudes, no doubt there will be at least one person who, you may guess, will not be there a year from now.

As soon as you know or suspect that you will have a vacant position, you should start thinking of ways of filling it. Recruiting from outside may not be the only answer -- you may want to re-organize and re-assign work, or you may want to train someone already on staff.

If you decide that recruiting someone is the answer, you should plan the recruiting process as thoroughly as possible.

### Plan Each Step

Whether you are hiring a typist or a chief administrative officer, in either a village or a city, the steps involved will be basically the same, and should be planned ahead of time.

1. Decide what you are looking for in terms of the job to be done, how it fits in with the rest of the organization, the qualifications needed to do the job, the personal qualities that would be desirable, and the salary to be paid. In other words, establish a clear understanding of the job and the person needed to fill it.
2. Attract promising candidates with a good ad in the right places. (This includes "internal" notices for present staff of the municipality.)
3. Select those you wish to interview from the applications you receive and advise the other applicants so that they will not be left wondering and waiting for an interview.



4. Plan and schedule the interviews, deciding what you need to know about the applicants, what questions to ask, and what information you can provide about the job.
5. Conduct the interviews and narrow the field to about two or three "finalists". (Some people refer to this as "short listing".)
6. Check these final candidates further. This will probably involve talking to past employers, the present employer (if you have the candidates' permission), and you may want to have another in-depth interview.
7. Make an offer to the best qualified candidate and prepare an employment agreement or contract or other documentation. (And don't forget to notify the remaining candidates that you have made your choice.)

(Some of the details of these steps will be pursued in later bulletins.)

Planning each of these steps is really a matter of deciding who will do it, how it will be done, and when.

#### Decide Who Should Be Involved

One generally accepted "rule" is that the position's immediate supervisor should be directly and centrally involved in each step of the hiring process. After all, the supervisor will be dealing with the person every day and will be responsible for the person's work.

That does not mean that other people cannot be enlisted to help, especially when professional or management staff are being hired that will play a key role in the municipal operation.

If you, as a municipal manager, have to hire someone, there are many sources of help. If the job involves a skill (typing, machine operation), a technical field (computers, bookkeeping), or a profession (accounting, law) that you are not familiar with, you might have someone help you to assess candidates' qualifications, experience, and ability. Your own personnel officer, if you have one, can test certain skills, as can employment agencies. Professional associations may be willing to help you assess the education and experience qualifications of candidates. Some



municipalities have found that people in the community are helpful; you may get sound advice from colleagues in local businesses or industries or from people at local colleges and universities. Neighbouring municipalities might help too.

If the job involves working closely with another department of the municipality or a local board or commission, someone there might be consulted when you are examining the job and determining the type of person needed, and they might even help in the interview stage.

If the job is a senior one with management responsibilities, you may feel that the help of a consulting firm is justified. They can discuss the job and the organization with you and help to pinpoint the type of person you should be looking for. They may even point out some improvements to the way you want the job to function or they may recommend, based on their experience, that the salary being offered is inappropriate. Writing and placing the ad and helping you select candidates to be interviewed are areas they are usually expert in. You may want to think of having consultants conduct initial "screening" interviews, too, but you would probably feel more secure if you were involved in all interviews. In other words, you cannot just "hand over" the job to a consulting firm -- and they would probably be the first ones to tell you that.

Hiring one person over others in a group, especially when they are all good candidates, is a difficult decision. You should consider all possible sources of help. Keep in mind, though, that others can help but you have to make the decision. It is not necessary for everyone to agree with the final choice, nor should that tough choice be left to someone else.

### Plan Council Involvement

The degree to which council is involved in hiring is undoubtedly most affected by the size of the municipality, which in turn dictates the type of staff the municipality has.

In small municipalities, councils are much more involved in the "management" aspects of the entire operation. When the size of a municipality allows it to have full-time, experienced managers and administrators, the tendency, and quite rightly so, is to delegate the hiring process more and more. The point is reached where council is only advised of staff appointments and is not involved at all,



with the exception of those positions that report to council directly and the appointment by-laws for statutory officers.

As a general rule, though, if your council is involved in selecting staff for any positions other than those that report to council directly, perhaps your hiring process should be reviewed and changed.

In other cases where the job reports directly to council, such as the Chief Administrative Officer or the Town Manager or the Clerk-Treasurer, of course council must make the hiring decision. The question is "How?" There are probably as many different practices as there are municipalities, but it may be helpful to consider some of the alternatives here.

A lot of detailed work is involved in recruiting; for example, writing the ad; placing it in appropriate publications; talking to newspapers about type size, cost, and format; approving invoices; and so on. Council members would undoubtedly want help with such things. It would seem logical to have either the personnel department or, if there isn't one, the clerk or clerk-treasurer perform those administrative functions for council.

There are also numerous decisions to be made throughout the hiring process, such as approving the job description, approving the ad, selecting candidates to be interviewed, determining a "short-list" of three or four from those interviewed. These decisions could be made by the whole council, but would probably be made faster and easier by a special committee of councillors.

An alternative to setting up such a special "selection team" of councillors would be to use an existing standing committee of council; the Public Works Committee, for instance, might be the selection team for hiring the head of the Engineering Department who reports to that Committee directly. Adopting this alternative would depend on the workload of the standing committees, of course. It may not work, either, if the standing committees have so many members as to make the recruitment process unmanageable. More than three or four people is awkward.

Some municipalities have a standing personnel committee of council to handle recruiting and other personnel matters. The volume of such transactions in your municipality may not justify that, however.



In any of these team situations, it is important that everyone be clear on roles and responsibilities. If the personnel department or the clerk is to provide administrative support to the council, what activities will they undertake? How long will it take? How much will it cost? What decisions can be made? What information and guidance is needed from council? If a committee of council or a team of councillors is to make most of the decisions in the process, what are those decisions? When should they be made? What help and information do they need to make them? Finally, how does council want to make that final selection? Does it want to interview the three or four final candidates? Does it want to have the selection team do the interviewing and make a recommendation on the best candidate? Should verbal progress reports be given to council throughout the process?

So far, the discussion of council involvement in the hiring of municipal staff has treated council or a committee of council as a unified whole. In many situations, though, an individual council member may want to be involved or may be asked to help by a member of the staff. The council member may have a lot of experience in recruiting in his or her own work, or may simply have a concern about the quality of the municipal staff.

Individual council members should think twice about exercising any influence in this area. Other councillors or staff may interpret this help as interference or even attempted patronage. If the person does not work out, the council member could be blamed for a bad selection. It is one of those areas that can backfire.

### Estimate Time and Cost

The time factor in the recruiting process deserves considerable attention. It always takes more time than you thought it would. Try to set realistic time limits at each stage: placing the ad depends on the publishing dates of the trade journals or periodicals you want them in; you have to allow time to receive applications; interviews may take a while to arrange, especially if travel time or vacation periods are involved; the person you choose will have to give fair and reasonable notice to his or her present employer. It all adds up to a matter of months. If you try to rush the process, you may end up compromising on the quality of the candidates you attract.

Unreasonable delays will lose good candidates as well. You can avoid some delays by planning the process in advance, deciding who will do what and when. You can also avoid delays by estimating the costs involved and getting the prior approvals you may need. If you already have money to advertise and recruit in your budget, you may not need further approvals. But if the vacancy was not predicted, you will have to get funds to cover the costs of advertising, the travel expenses of candidates and perhaps their spouses, consultant costs if you use a consulting firm, re-location costs, and the possible increase in salary that you might have to pay to get the candidate you want. If you predict these possible expenses, and get prior approval, the recruiting process will go more smoothly for you and for the candidates.

### Summary

Hiring staff is not like filling potholes -- every pothole is the same, more or less; every job in every municipality is unique.

First try to predict vacancies.

Then, before you advertise, spend some time finding out about the job and the type of person that should fill it. (The next bulletin on recruiting will discuss this.)

Then make a conscious decision as to whether you have to recruit from outside or not. If you do, plan your recruiting campaign.

- What are the actions to be taken and the decisions to be made?
- Who will be involved?
- What will each person do?
- Should you get some help from people outside?
- How much will it cost to hire someone, and how long will the process take?

The planning exercise really won't take very long and it will certainly pay dividends. Your recruiting process will hold fewer "surprises" and will run more smoothly for everyone. You may even find yourself enjoying it, if you can relax a little.



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